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Disillusioned Nicaraguan Rebel Says He'd Accept Aid From CIA

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WASHINGTON — A leader of a group of disillusioned Sandinistas says his organization is willing to accept aid from the Central Intelligence Agency in its fight against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Alfonso Robelo sat on the Sandinistas' revolutionary junta in 1979 but now belongs to a group of exiles led by one-time Sandinista hero Eden Pastora. He outlined his views in an interview in Washington.

Robelo said his group, "as a pragmatic matter," had held talks with another group of Nicaraguan rebels — some of whom have been accused of being followers of the late deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza.

Robelo's comments appeared to represent a shift in policy for his group, which is based in Costa Rica. Until now, he, Pastora, and their allies had stayed away from any association with the CIA or the "contras" — counter-revolutionaries — for fear of tainting their reputations.

But Robelo's remarks indicated an increasing willingness to join with groups considered right-wing or counter-revolutionary in order to oust his country's Marxist government.

"We are not willing to accept aid that would tie our hands," Robelo said. "But we would accept aid from any honest source that will not threaten our independence."

"People say the CIA has a connotation of dirty money. But aren't those clean dollars, coming from the American taxpayers? Isn't that a legal, legitimate organization of the U.S. government?"

The Pastora-Robelo group is called the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, or ARDE, its Spanish acronym. Reliable sources say its fighting force numbers several hundred.

The other main group of rebels is the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. It has been operating out of Honduras. It is believed to have a few thousand fighting men. Its leaders admit that as many as 70 percent of its military commanders belonged to Somoza's National Guard, which became a synonym for repression. But they maintain that they want democracy, not a return to dictatorship.

Robelo said his group still wanted a political solution, rather than a military one. But he said the Sandinistas had closed the door on that and it had become necessary to organize an armed opposition.

Robelo made his comments at a time of increasing uneasiness in Congress about financing covert operations against Nicaragua. On Tuesday, the House Intelligence Committee voted to cut off money for such aid by the CIA or any other U.S. entity.

The Senate Intelligence Committee voted on Friday to allow the aid to continue until Sept. 30. It said, however, that the aid would stop after that unless President Ronald Reagan satisfactorily defined the scope of the U.S.-backed operations.

Robelo, a neatly dressed man with a dark beard, was a businessman who joined a coalition of forces that toppled Somoza in July 1979. Robelo was a member of the five-person junta that took power after the revolution.

But nine months later, Robelo left the junta, saying that the Sandinistas were becoming increasingly repressive. He said the country was controlled by Cubans and noted that the promised elections were never held. Eventually he left and went to Costa Rica — a country he admires for its democracy.

Pastora is the famed "Commander Zero" who stormed Somoza's bunker. He, too, became disillusioned and went into exile in Costa Rica. Last week his forces staged a raid inside Nicaragua in which he reported 60 government casualties. The Sandinistas said only two of their soldiers and one of Pastora's were killed.

"Our objective can be summarized in one sentence," Robelo said. "We are fighting for the democratic rescue of the Nicaraguan revolution."

Robelo said he hoped for significant defections from the Sandinista army and militia as his own fighters gain credibility. He acknowledged the difficulty of overthrowing a firmly entrenched government. But he said Pastora's efforts in the south of Nicaragua, along with the other rebels' raids in the north, might force the Sandinistas into negotiating.



Alfonso Robelo

"Military action was the only way we could get the attention of the Sandinistas," Robelo said. He said that military success would increase his group's credibility with potential allies such as the Socialist International and liberals in the U.S. Congress.

Robelo said he had met with members of Congress and State Department officials on his trip to Washington. How much U.S. aid, if any, might go to his group is still unknown.

"We cannot liberate Nicaragua alone," Robelo declared. "The Soviets and Cubans are there. If the other superpower, the United States, abandons Nicaragua — then there is no hope."